

THE ORNITHOGRAPHIA AMERICANA OF FATHER PLUMIER, 1689-1696

FRANÇOIS BOURLIERE

FATHER C. Plumier was a noted pioneer of West Indian botany. Between 1689 and 1696, he undertook 3 successful expeditions in the West Indies, visiting various islands such as Martinique, Saint Domingue (now Haiti),



Green Heron. Pen and ink drawing of Father Plumier. Plate 87 of his unpublished *Ornithographia Americana*. Courtesy Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.

Saint Vincent, Bequia, Saint Christophe, Santa Cruz and Saint Thomas. Most of the botanical results of these expeditions were published in a series of famous books: *Description des plantes de l'Amérique avec leurs figures*, 1693; *Nova plantarum americanarum genera*, 1703; *Traité des fougères de l'Amérique*, 1705 and *Plantarum americanarum fasciculus primus [-decimus]* . . ., 1755-1760. These beautiful books are especially noteworthy for their plates engraved after the field-sketches of the author. But Father Plumier, like many old-style naturalists, was not solely interested by plants and, during his travels, made numerous sketches of birds, mammals, fishes and various invertebrates. These unpublished drawings are now preserved in the central library of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Among them, a beautiful collection of ornithological plates, bound in a folio volume bearing the number Ms 27 and entitled *Ornithographia americana*, is worthy of interest for ornithologists.

Through the kindness of Madame G. Duprat, librarian of the Museum National, I have been able to examine at length these drawings and, with the help of Mr. J. Berlioz, curator of the ornithological department of the same institution, I succeeded in identifying most of the birds figured. Most of the drawings are water-colors probably made in France after the field-sketches preserved in a second volume (Ms 29) and bearing numerous notations on the color of the plumage and soft parts of the birds. Other drawings are exact pen and ink replicas of the original sketches.

Some of the birds are unusually lively, e.g. the Green Heron of the plate 87 here reproduced, and suggest that they were sketched from life. A few plates are very careful anatomical drawings, e.g. plates 91 to 93, while a lot are mere "stuffed" pictures, probably drawn from dead birds. A few birds cannot be identified, the sketches being unfinished or lacking in precision. Also, some birds pictured are unquestionably composite ones (plates 71 and 94), drawn from memory or after freakish descriptions of some settlers.

A good deal of these drawings are completed by manuscript notes giving vernacular (French and Carib) names and some peculiarities of the birds pictured.

The following 68 species may be easily identified.

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| <i>Colymbus dominicus</i> (pl. 59) | <i>Jacana spinosa</i> (pl. 73 and 74) |
| <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i> (pl. 60) | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> (pl. 88). In his |
| <i>Puffinus lherminieri</i> (pl. 27), with egg. | notes, Plumier describes the peculiar |
| <i>Phaethon aethereus</i> (pl. 34, 35). Plumier | feeding behavior of this bird. He said |
| notes that this bird was observed by him | he never observed it elsewhere than in the |
| "apud insulam Martinicanam". | Grenadines. |
| <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i> (pl. 91 to 93) | <i>Charadrius vociferus</i> (pl. 63) |
| <i>Fregata magnificens</i> (pl. 7 and 36). Plumier | <i>Capella gallinago</i> (pl. 61) |
| observed this bird forcing boobies to | <i>Totanus melanoleucus</i> (pl. 90) |
| disgorge fish. | <i>Erolia minutilla</i> (pl. 65) |
| <i>Casmerodius albus</i> (pl. 80 and 85) | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> (pl. 89) |
| <i>Florida caerulea</i> (pl. 77 and 78). Plumier | <i>Larus atricilla</i> (pl. 30) |
| figures the adult and the immature birds. | <i>Sterna dougallii</i> (pl. 31 and 32) |
| <i>Bulweria virescens</i> (pl. 83 and 87) | <i>Sterna fuscata</i> (pl. 28). Plumier figures the |
| <i>Nyctanassa violacea</i> (pl. 81 and 86) | egg and describes the nest. He said that |
| <i>Ixobrychus exilis</i> (pl. 84) | an important nesting colony was then |
| <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> (pl. 75) | located at "Le diamant" (Diamond Rock) |
| <i>Guara alba</i> (pl. 76). | near Martinique. [James Bond suggests |
| <i>Ajaia ajaja</i> (pl. 95) | that this may be <i>S. anaethetus</i> . Editor] |
| <i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i> (pl. 96) | <i>Anoëus stolidus</i> (pl. 29) |
| <i>Buteogallus anthracinus</i> (pl. 4), seen by | <i>Columba squamosa</i> (pl. 23) |
| Plumier in Union Island, Grenadines. | <i>Columbigallina passerina</i> (pl. 25) |
| <i>Falco sparverius</i> (pl. 5 and 6) | <i>Oreopeleia chrysia</i> (pl. 24) |
| <i>Aramus guarauna</i> (pl. 82) | <i>Coccyzus minor</i> (pl. 14). Said to exist in |
| <i>Porphyrula martinica</i> (pl. 65 and 66) | St. Domingue and Tortuge Island. |
| <i>Gallinula chloropus cerceris</i> (pl. 69 and 70) | <i>Saurothera longirostris</i> (pl. 12 and 13). Said |
| <i>Fulica caribaea</i> (pl. 68) | to be common at St. Domingue. |

- Crotophaga ani* (pl. 19). Observed in St. Domingue. "Gregarim vivunt", said Plumier.
- Tyto alba* (pl. 8 and 9). Observed only at St. Vincent.
- Speotyto cunicularia* (pl. 10). Named by Plumier *Ulula cunicularia* or Chevêche lapin. The burrowing habits of this owl are well described in manuscript notes as well as the bird's amusing habit of bobbing up and down when alarmed.
- Chaetura* sp. (pl. 38)
- Eulampis jugularis* (pl. 41)
- Orthorhyncus cristatus* (pl. 40)
- Temnotrogon roseigaster* (pl. 16 to 18). St. Domingue.
- Todus angustirostris* (pl. 42). Said to live "apud insulam Sandominicarum". [*T. subulatus*?]
- Centurus striatus* (pl. 14)
- Tyrannus dominicensis* (pl. 46)
- Progne subis dominicensis* (pl. 38)
- Corvus leucognathus* (pl. 58). St. Domingue.
- Mimocichla ardosiacea* (pl. 51)
- Cichlherminia pherminieri* (pl. 52)
- Myadestes genibarbis dominicanus* (pl. 47)
- Dulus dominicus* (pl. 63)
- Coereba flaveola* (pl. 41)
- Dendroica erithachorides rufigula* (pl. 39)
- Dendroica discolor* (pl. 42)
- Seiurus aurocapillus* (pl. 43)
- Quiscalus lugubris* (pl. 53)
- Icterus bonana* (pl. 39)
- Phaenicophilus palmarum* (pl. 43)
- Saltator albicollis* (pl. 50)
- Loxigilla violacea* (pl. 50).

Among introduced species, the following were observed by Plumier between 1689 and 1696:

- Ortalis ruficauda* (pl. 57). Said to be very common in St. Vincent and Grenadines. The species was certainly introduced very early and was already naturalized at the end of the seventeenth century.
- Crax alector* (pl. 54 and 55), *Icterus jamacai* (pl. 44) and *Rhamphastos erythrorhynchus* (pl. 15) were undoubtedly pictured after cage birds. For the last species, Plumier notes that this bird is not indigenous in the West Indies.